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AUTHOR Chervinko, James S.
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ABSTRACT

To remedy the problems caused when staff members in research libraries are unable to read and understand foreign language materials, the library can institute special foreign language training courses. Ideally, the course should be taught by a librarian with foreign language competence and teaching ability. Basic grammar, library-oriented vocabulary, dictionary usage, and translation practice should be covered in the course. To allow individual attention, the class should be limited in size. Also, it should be accommodated into the normal work schedule and meet once a week to allow time for homework assignments. Since very few textbooks on teaching librarians a foreign language exist, handouts would have to be created to explain selected points of grammar. Each outside assignment should translate an example of library material and analyze specific grammatical forms in the passage. Finally, the participants should evaluate the course to insure that it satisfies their job requirements. Included are a sample survey and a list of four sources. (Author/RBF)

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LANGUAGE TRAINING FOR LIBRARIANS:

A Proposal

by

James S. Chervinko

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James S. Chervinko
Catalog Department
Morris Library
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, Illinois, 62901

Language training for librarians--a proposal

A troublesome problem that exists in libraries, especially in research libraries, is the frequent inability of the staff to easily handle foreign language publications and documents. It is true that most large libraries have some language specialists on the staff, but other members of the staff frequently encounter foreign language materials as part of their jobs and are often at a loss when they do encounter them. In addition to foreign language publications, such as monographs and periodicals, staff members might, as part of their work activity, handle related documents--for example, foreign language order forms, notices, correspondances, abstracts, annotations, and so forth. With the ever-increasing publishing activity by foreign language publishers the library staff as a whole is very likely working with more foreign language materials than ever before. Furthermore, with the expanding participation by libraries in on-line bibliographic networks there will undoubtedly be even more staff contact with foreign language materials.

While professional and para-professional librarians are often required to have a knowledge of a foreign language for employment, in reality they usually do not possess sufficient foreign language competence or ability to understand and properly handle foreign language materials, especially if various languages are encountered. Moreover, with the de-emphasis of foreign language training in U. S. academic institutions over the past decade this situation is becoming and very likely will become more common in the library.

While it is sometimes possible for a staff member to take time off from the job to take a language course outside the library, it would usually be very difficult and impractical for a large number of staff members to take off from work to do such a thing, since most language classes meet three or four hours a week. Furthermore, these classes usually teach more language skills than are really needed in library work; namely, speaking writing, and listening skills are not essential to handle foreign language documents. Also, much of what is needed in library work is not taught in general language classes; for example, bibliographical terminology and bibliographical abbreviations would not normally be covered in these classes.

A Workable solution

In order to solve this problem, libraries can, and several libraries already do, provide the staff with in-service foreign language training. A library can fairly easily develop a training program which would enable staff members to read a foreign language sufficiently to handle most bibliographical situations which require the knowledge of a foreign language.

For a library to institute such a program it must first be determined which language should be taught. This can be done by simply surveying the staff. Secondly, an instructor must be recruited. Ideally the instructor would be a librarian with foreign language expertise who knows how to teach. Otherwise, an instructor could be retained from outside the library and could develop and teach the course in collaboration with a librarian.

Any staff member who encounters foreign language materials should be encourged to take the course. The course announcement should include a

brief course description, so that potential participants would know what to expect. Moreover, it is wise to require that those planning to take the course have their supervisors' approval, in order to avoid problems about release time from the job.

The Class and the course

The size of the class should not exceed ten, since individual attention is required to teach a foreign language effectively. A larger group would make this attention difficult to achieve. Also, in many libraries it may not be practical to have more than ten people off the job at one time.

The class should meet at least once a week for one hour. Because of staffing and job requirements in the library, it may be impossible for it to meet more often. A class period of one hour is preferable, since a person's attention span in a language class is usually strained beyond one hour. An advantage of a once a week meeting schedule is that there would be sufficient time for outside assignments. Furthermore, in an academic library it may be helpful if the course coincides with the academic calendar of the institution, so that staff members could arrange their schedules to take other classes without conflict if they wish.

To satisfy the needs of most library situations, the objectives of the course should be to provide sufficient language competency to read and understand with the aid of a dictionary library-oriented materials; for example, catalog cards, bibliographic entries, bibliographic data in books and periodicals, annotations, simple correspondances, and publishers' notices. To accomplish these objectives, the course should provide basic grammar, basic library-oriented vocabulary, transliteration--if the language has a non-roman alphabet, bibliographic abbreviations, and dictionary usage.

A major difficulty in setting up such a course is that there are few textbooks available designed for teaching a language to librarians. Most language manuals for librarians are quick reference sources and cannot be used effectively as a textbook. Textbooks used in general undergraduate language classes are for the most part inappropriate and irrelevant for use in a reading course for librarians. These textbooks are normally designed for the audio-lingual method of instruction, and the vocabulary and exercises in them usually do not meet the needs of the library staff. The instructor, therefore, would have to prepare handouts designed specifically for the course. The handouts should provide a clear presentation of the grammar elements and examples of actual usage.

With the small amount of time allowed for the course only the major language elements with few exceptions should be taught. This would limit the scope of the course to only those elements normally encountered in library work. In the case of German, for example, those would include the alphabet, nouns and pronouns, adjectives and adverbs and their comparisons, prepositions, cardinal and ordinal numbers, verbs--covering only the most used tenses in the indicative mood, relative pronouns and clauses, and participles.

A Russian course would include the alphabet, transliteration, nouns and pronouns, adjectives and adverbs and their comparisons, personal names, prepositions, cardinal and ordinal numbers, verbs--all tenses in the indicative mood and both aspects, relative pronouns and clauses, and participles and gerunds.

A Sample syllabus

A sample instructor's syllabus for a German course would look some-

thing like this:

CLASS	TOPIC
1	Course description.
	Alphabet--go over the alphabet and explain the oddities; for example, umlauts, diphthongs, and consonant clusters.
	Sounds--briefly have the class repeat words illustrating the sounds of the letters in the German alphabet.
2	Declension of the definite and indefinite singular articles.
	Gender--describe how gender works in the German language.
	Go over the declension of both strong and weak singular nouns.
	Show how cases work in German sentences.
3	Declension of the plural articles.
	The plural of strong and weak nouns.
	Describe how to look up nouns and how to interpret the abbreviations used in the dictionary.
4	Prepositions and their cases.
	Verbs--infinitive and present tense of strong and weak verbs.
5	Adjectives--singular and plural forms of attributive and predicate adjectives.
	Usage of adverbs.
	Formation of the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives and adverbs.
6	Cardinal and ordinal numbers.
	Describe how to look up adjectives, adverbs and prepositions in the dictionary.
7	Pronouns--declension and usage.

Possessive adjectives--declension and usage.

Declension of "der" and "ein" words.

8 Verbs--future tense and past tense (simple and compound).

9 Verbs--separable and inseparable prefixes.

Reflexive verbs.

10 Verbs--modal auxiliaries.

Impersonal expressions.

11 Verbs--passive voice.

Describe how to look up verbs in the dictionary and how to use any irregular verb tables in the dictionary.

12 Relative pronouns and clauses.

13 Adjectival participles and participial clauses.

14 Translation of title pages and catalog cards.

15 Translation of bibliographical entries and annotations.

16 Go over the work of the previous class.

Course evaluation.

A Teaching technique

It is suggested that the class hour be divided between presenting the new material and going over the previous week's homework. Since the objective of the course is to provide a reading knowledge of the language, the homework should be to translate into English sentences and phrases illustrating the grammatical points of the day. There should also be some translation of library-type material; for example, titles, imprints, series statements, and so forth. A suggested method of reviewing the assignment is to call on a student at random to translate a sentence and to identify

grammatically certain underlined forms; for example, for nouns the student should give the gender, number, and case, or for verbs he or she should give the tense, person, number, voice, and the infinitive form. By analyzing the grammatical forms in this manner the students will be able to achieve a much better understanding of the language and, consequently, a much better reading ability. Moreover, this technique fulfills a dual function of keeping the class lively and interesting and compels the students to prepare each assignment. After the grammar section of the course is completed, an assignment should be given reviewing elements that caused the most difficulty.

The homework assignments are also an excellent means of teaching vocabulary. It is almost impossible to learn vocabulary by memorizing a list of words; rather, vocabulary must be learned in context through repetition. The sentences created for the homework assignments should be constructed so that they both introduce new and review old vocabulary. With this sort of repetition the students will be able to acquire a good, working, library-oriented vocabulary by the end of the course.

Dictionary usage is a vital part of the course. A good way to present the dictionary is to make it a part of each grammatical element as it is covered. For example, after nouns are taught, show how nouns are treated in the dictionary. Do the same for adjectives, verbs, and so forth. This method will enable the students to effectively use the dictionary in their assignments as the course progresses. There should be an explanation of the abbreviations used in the dictionary and of special uses of words; for example, the meanings of prepositions used with different

cases. Cross references should be explained; for example, in German gelesen see lesen. Special tables, such as an irregular verb table, should be explained.

The Course evaluation

In order to determine the success of the course and to identify the areas needing improvement, a course evaluation should be made by the students. A form should be constructed to evaluate both the method of instruction and the content of the course. Under method of instruction there should be questions seeking suggested improvements in the class presentations, the handouts, and the homework. Similarly, under course content there should be questions to determine what should be added or subtracted from the course and which items should be expanded. Furthermore, the class could be asked to comment on the order in which the items were presented and on the general relevance of the material to their jobs.

Programs such as this can be quite successful, if they are well organized and managed. In addition, they provide an excellent means of staff development.

References:

1. A very useful book to consult in setting up a foreign language program for librarians is: Allen, C. G. A Manual of European Languages for Librarians. London and New York: Bowker, 1975. This book covers many languages and includes a brief grammar of each along with a list of bibliographic terminology in each language.

2. A more extensive list of bibliographic terminology in several languages can be found in: Orne, Jerrold. The Language of the Foreign Book Trade.

3rd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 1976.

3. Two books that can be used as textbooks for a Russian language program are: Kent, Rosalind. Reading the Russian Language; a guade for librarians and other professionals. New York: Marcel Dekker, 1974; and Walker, G. P. M. Russian for Librarians. London: Clive Bingley, 1973.